Improving Scholarly Discourse: Responding to Reviewers and Understanding Scholarly Impact

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Abstract: Publication expectations continue to rise at academic institutions. Successfully publishing an article means effectively responding to reviewer comments. In this paper, I briefly delineate the publication process. I discuss best practices for responding to reviewer comments and provide examples. I review how the scholarly impact of one's work is measured. Terms such as impact factor, H-index, and ¡10 index are defined and critiqued. Altmetric measures the effect of scholarly impact in social media. I describe and critique venues for sharing research such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu.

Keywords: scholarship, publication, reviewers, scholarly impact

Academics need to produce research and scholarship. Part of the publication process is to respond to reviewers' feedback on an author's manuscript. Useful answers to reviewers' suggestions increase the chance of publication. I discuss the academic publication process. I define journal article ratings (e.g., accept, conditional accept, revise and resubmit, and reject), include some best practices to respond to reviewers, and provide some sample responses. I explain how scholarly impact is measured and how researchers can promote their scholarship.

Academic Publication Process

There are responsibilities for authors, journals, and reviewers in the publication process. Authors need to select the most appropriate journal for their work after examining the journal's submission guidelines (Cherrstrom, 2020). The submission guidelines detail the journal's mission, which describes the topics the journal covers, the methodological approaches welcomed (e.g., qualitative or quantitative methodologies), the epistemologies, and the audience (e.g., scholars, practitioners, teachers, policymakers). Authors should review published articles in their targeted journals, decide on a journal, write the manuscript, blind the document so there is no identifying information on it, and submit the manuscript (Cherrstrom, 2020).

Journal editors determine if the article is appropriate for the journal. If the item is deemed within the scope of the journal, it is sent out for review. Generally, two or three reviewers receive the article. The article may be under consideration for several months. The reviewers provide feedback and recommend a decision (Cherrstrom, 2020). Journal editors consolidate reviewers' feedback, add to reviewer comments, decide on the manuscript, and send the author a letter advising the author of the decision and recommend the next steps.

Decisions on articles generally fall into four categories. The first option is: *accepted without revisions.* This decision is rare. The *conditional accept* rating indicates that minor revisions are needed, including but not limited to adding more details in the methods section, including citations from particular authors, or adding more information in the

implications and conclusions section. The *revise and resubmit* rating indicates that the reviewers see promise in their scholarship. The manuscript needs more substantive changes and is often sent out for a second review. *Reject* means the journal did not find the article suitable for the journal. Authors need to target another journal, revise the manuscript, and submit it (Cherrstrom, 2020). Other possible responses from journals can include *major revisions* or *reject and resubmit*. In these cases, the journal sees promise, but there is very substantive work to do.

Reviewers' Comments

The quality of reviews varies. In general, a more detailed review helps the author improve the subsequent submission. "Literature that explores the relationship between transformative learning and trauma is needed in the literature review. The authors may consider the following sources [with article and book citations listed]" is more helpful than "More transformative learning/trauma literature is needed." Consider reviewers' constructive comments as a gift. They want to improve the manuscript. Reviewers' comments can range from helpful and constructive to personal and irrelevant. It is best to ignore personal, irrelevant comments. Mean-spirited comments say more about the reviewer than the manuscript.

The journal editors consolidate the comments. Attend to what *they* consider essential to revise. Good editors provide adequate guidance that informs the author how to change the manuscript to increase the chance of publication.

Best Practices for Responding to Reviewer Comments

A response letter is required that details the changes made per the reviewers' recommendations. The letter includes a summary of the changes made and delves into more specific detail. Some suggestions follow as to how to respond to reviewer comments.

Be polite and courteous when responding to reviewer comments. Reviewers' comments generally reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the article. If the reviewer did not understand an aspect of the author's work, recognize that readers may not either. Write an article for an intelligent audience that may not be an expert on the topic. The item needs to be understood by everyone, not just those who specialize in the article's subject (Noble, 2017). Provide clear responses to reviewers in a linear, point-by-point manner (Nobel, 2017). Taking the reviewers' comments verbatim or providing a good summary and responding to the critique with the revision allows reviewers to ascertain how the author addressed their comments efficiently. For example, the authors may choose to present their responses in a feedback form. Table 1 represents how my colleagues and I responded to editors' comments, which led to article publication (Deer et al., 2020).

Accommodate reviewers' requests to the best of one's ability. If reviewers' comments substantively help shape the manuscript, acknowledge their contributions (Noble, 2017). Sometimes the author cannot accommodate the request. The author should appreciate the advice and explain why she/he cannot address the issue. A phrase such as, "Thank you for your

suggestion to expand the discussion. Instead, we refer the reader to articles for further study as this would help us to keep within the word limit of the paper" (Tress Academic, 2019a, para. 5).

Table 1: *Reviewer Responses to Editors' Comments in Table Form*

Editors' comments	Action/Responses
Thus, there is just a bit of additional work to do. Table 1 reports considerable heterogeneity in the variables "age at entry" and "years in the sex trade." We would have liked to read more quotes from Elle and Gloria, as they tend to represent the more senior employees in your sample—and their transitions to legal work might have intersected with age	We returned to the data to address this suggestion, specifically the interview transcripts with Gloria and Elle. Two issues arise: First, the editors' comment points us to an error in the table—we had mislabeled participants ages at the time of the interview as age of entry. We have corrected the error and relabeled the columns Second, we agree that age is a relevant consideration but in connection to the purpose for this manuscript, age is not present in the data. As a result, we added an additional participant quote from Gloria (p. 18) regarding age and pursuing higher education. Her only other comment about age-related to how strange it was that people still sensed a couple of participants made (independent of age), but not relevant to this paper. Elle did not make any comments reflective of age and no additional transcript quotes would add value.
Could you add some reflections on the influence age or senior might have on the reported findings?	We have added the issue of age as a recommendation for future research (p. 27). As previously discussed, the issue of age was not sufficiently present in the data for us to be able to justify saying much.
Second, your findings are highly relevant for other women intending to exit the sex trade. In addition, we see relevance of your findings to transpeople and to men who have sex with men—perhaps these two populations could be included as a direction for future research that follows from your pioneering work.	We have expanded the recommendations for future research to include additional marginalized groups, including transgender individuals and men engaged in sex work (p. 28).

Understanding Scholarly Impact

As the number of publications and their impact affects tenure and promotion decisions, it is crucial to know the various ways that the impact of an individual's scholarship is measured. I

review several measurement indexes, including the impact factor, h-index, and the ¡10 index and Google Scholar. Venues for distributing scholars' research are delineated.

The article's scholarly impact is quantified in several ways. Journals indexed in the Web of Science and Scopus have impact factors. A journal's impact factor is "used to sort or rank journals by their relative importance" (The Ohio State University, 2018, para 1). The higher the impact factor, the more prestigious the journal. The H-index measures "the number of papers (h) with a citation number [greater or equal to] h" (Cornell, University, 2020a). If a scholar has an H-index of 14, that means s/he has 14 papers cited at least 14 times. The advantages to this measurement allow for "direct comparisons within disciplines," and this number "measures quantity and impact by a single value" (Cornell University Library, 2020b, paras. 5-6). However, the number is not accurate for early-career researchers. Articles published in the Web of Science are the only ones indexed" (Cornell University Library, 2020b). Google Scholar reports the H-index on Google Scholar Citations. Last, the ¡10 index measures "the number of publications with at least ten citations" in Google Scholar (Cornell University Library, 2020b, para.2).

There are several ways to view one's scholarship's influence. Google Scholar provides the scholars' names, institutional affiliations, research areas, and publications. The scholarship is listed in descending order, with the most cited citation listed first and the year it was published. To the right of this list is the total number of citations, h-index, and ¡10 index scores for all time and within the last five years. A bar graph pictorially represents the number of citations per year.

ResearchGate

ResearchGate is a website that provides a venue for researchers and scholars to share their research. ResearchGate, founded in 2008, has "over 17 million members from all over the world" (ResearchGate, para 1, 2020). Their mission is to "connect the world of science and make research open to all" (ResearchGate, para 1, 2020). Scholars share their work publicly or upload a copy of their scholarship available on request. A scholar's site statistics include Research Interest. A Research Interest score shows how individuals are interacting with one's work. Metrics included in the score are publication views, downloads, recommending the scholar's work, and the publication's citations (Research Interest, 2020). Several metrics are not calculated in the score, including "multiple reads and recommendations by a researcher in a single week" (Research Interest, 2020, para 13), inquiries by automated systems, and reads by people outside the ResearchGate community. The number of citations the work received, recommendations, and publication recommendations round out the metrics. These statistics are provided in a graphic form on the "Stats" page also.

ResearchGate features a "Scores" page where members can see their ResearchGate score, which is "calculated based on any contribution you share on ResearchGate or add to one's profile such as published articles, unpublished research, project, questions and answers (RG Score, 2020, para 1). This score includes published and unpublished work, projects the author has listed, and the questions the researchers have asked and answered (RG Score, 2020). The "Scores" page lists the author's publication with the highest H-index and provides suggestions for increasing the RG score.

ResearchGate provides an "About Me" section where authors briefly introduce the languages they speak, their disciplines, and their skills and expertise. There is a reminder to the scholar of the texts that do not have full texts yet. A graphic provides a research overview of the number of research items, projects the scholar is working on, the number of questions the scholar asked other scholars in ResearchGate, and the number of answers provided. ResearchGate members can show members' current projects in progress. The overview page includes the scholars' school affiliation and members who are following the scholar's work.

Academia.edu

In Academia.edu, researchers can upload papers to this site, see the number of document views of their research, the unique visitors to the site, and view profiles at no cost. Subscribers may download papers, track funding opportunities, search papers, see profiles of who is reading the scholar's work, and view scholarly impact measures. Other information that can be seen at no cost under the "Impact" feature of Academic.edu include the following demographics of those who viewed the scholars work: countries, cities, universities, research fields, job titles, pages read, traffic sources (e.g., Google, myway,), and how many people searched for the scholar's work.

For $99 a year, subscribers can see who cites and reads their work and have access to enhanced analytics, access to millions of papers, a personal website, grants, search alerts, and summaries of papers (Academia, 2020). Subscribers can also bulk download papers (Academia, 2020).

Altmetric

Altmetric measures how much attention your articles obtain by collecting data from social media, traditional media such as the *New York Times*, blogs from organizations and individual researchers, and online references managers. Altmetric tracks "the mention of a wide variety of publications including "books, book chapters, journal articles, presentations, dissertations, reports, conference proceedings, reviews, data sets, working papers, grey literature, [and] clinical trials" (Altmetric Sources, 2020, para 4). The sources they track authors mention of research include policy documents, online reference managers such as Mendeley and CiteULike, social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit and Wikipedia, YouTube, and Open Syllabus (Altmetric Sources, 2020).

Altmetric can showcase scholars' influence in the field when they apply for grants. Researchers can see where their colleagues' work is being visited (e.g., how often it is Tweeted, mentioned in blogs, read on Mendeley, etc.) and learn how to publicize their work best. Authors can see who is talking about their research, track activity around how their research is being seen, and these metrics. Altmetric provides "funders and review panels . . . the broader influence of [scholars'] work" (Altmetric for Researchers, 2020, para. 5).

Best Practices in Understanding Scholarly Impact and Promoting Scholarly Work

Submit your work to journals that have impact factors, if possible. The higher the impact factor, the better. The H-index and ¡10 factors are good to know. The dissemination through social

media allows authors to promote their work. ResearchGate and Academia.edu allow authors to disseminate their work. Paid subscriptions to Academia.edu unlocks a host of other features. Scholars may consider featuring their work on one or both platforms to build a reputation. Promoting works on blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube can increase authors' social media presence and authors can cite these Altmetric statistics when applying for grants.

In summary, scholars need to publish and promote their work. Responding to reviewers' comments effectively is a necessary aspect of the publication process. Tenure and promotion committees particularly note the impact of scholars' work as measured by a journal's impact factor. Altmetric also estimates how scholarly work is being seen. Authors can showcase their work and see others' work on ResearchGate and Academia.edu

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